

Country Differences in the Internationalization of Higher Education – How can Countries Lagging behind Diminish the Gap

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Abstract

This paper looks at the internationalization of higher education in a number of countries with the final purpose to make proposals for the acceleration of the higher education internationalization process of the countries that lag behind. It does that by first placing conceptually higher education in the context of globalization at world level and looking at a general level at the different components of the internationalization process in higher education. Then a review of internationalization of higher education at world level is done, with emphasis on mobility flows and the identification of the main country players. Few country examples with positive experiences in the process of higher education internationalization are discussed and than Romania as a country that is lagging behind is also analyzed. In the final section, the paper presents proposals related to how Romania as a country that at present lags behind others, can try to further develop the internationalization of its higher education.

Keywords: *higher education, internationalization, university management*

JEL classification: I21

Internationalization of Higher Education - an increasing phenomenon in the era of globalization

During the past decades we can easily observe the integration of higher education (HE) in the globalization process that takes place worldwide. Besides the fact that it is strongly connected with globalization, the internationalization of HE has various rationales (De Wit, 2002). Knight (1997) grouped these rationales into *four main categories*: 1) *political rationales*, that would assure the position and the role of the country in the world and contribute to its security, stability, peace, and ideological influence; 2) *economic rationales*, that would contribute to the improvement of human resources needed for the competitiveness of a nation at

international level; 3) *academic rationales*, that would lead to the fulfilment of the international standards regarding the quality of teaching and research; 4) *cultural and social rationales*, that would focus on the role and the place of culture and own language of a country and on the importance of understanding other cultures and foreign languages.

In this context appears the need to define the concept of the internationalization of higher education. According to Knight (1993) the internationalization of HE represents “the process of integrating the international / intercultural dimension in the educational processes, research activities and services an institution renders to society”. This process has a dynamic character, and its span comprises all three fundamental spheres of higher education: teaching, research and the interaction with society. A more detailed definition from the perspective of globalization is given by Van der Wende in 1997 (cited by Qiang, 2003). He considers that the internationalization is not a purpose in itself, but comprises also “systematic efforts made to adapt higher education to the requirements and challenges imposed by the globalization of societies, of national economies and of the labour market”. Thus, the internationalization becomes an important instrument in the academic development, meeting the requirements of the environment, and allowing the improvement and alignment of the standards of quality that exist at institutional and national levels. Another definition of the concept refers to the expansion of the borders for institutions, courses and programs. The process can comprise institutions and programs from a country that operate in various other countries, student mobility, and the creation of virtual institutions with missions mainly related to the internationalization and governmental interests (Eaton, 2001).

The arguments in the favour of increasing international visibility for the universities are plenty, irrespective of activity type: training activities or scientific research. There are *numerous factors* that put pressure on the academic management to internationalize HE (Qiang, 2003), out of which we outline the following:

- (1) *Evolution of the labour market*, which requires more and more adapted graduates to the needs of the new economy: besides the theoretical knowledge and practical skills, these need to know more foreign languages and to have social and multicultural competencies;
- (2) *Specialization of the scientific research* asks often for increased resources, insufficient at local level, imposing the establishment of international scientific consortia and networks;
- (3) *Attraction of foreign students* for educational and/or research programs that universities develop, ensuring often financial resources for universities that are not to be neglected;
- (4) *Employment of the newest information and communication technologies*, that allows surpassing the geographical barriers in offering academic services of high performance (Lefter and Bogdan, 2007).

From the perspective of the process analysis of the academic activities, we distinguish *three dimensions* of the internationalization activity:

1. *At the level of educational processes*: student mobility, curricular development, pedagogical modernization, development of programs with double degree or delocalization of degrees abroad;
2. *At the level of research activities*: mobility of teachers and researchers, participation in European and extra-Community thematic networks, staff recruitment at international level;
3. *At the level of the relationship with society*: development of public-private partnerships, participation in national and European funding programs.

In Europe, the internationalization process of HE gains specific characteristics. According to a survey done by the European Commission in the academic environment (Aubé et. al., 2006), the activities specific to the departments of international relations in order of importance, are: ERASMUS student mobility (98%), foreign students' mobility (75%), teachers' and researchers' mobility (50%), administration of cooperation agreements (48%). The adoption of the credits system is a key component in the development of the European Higher Education Area as the objective of the Bologna process. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) becomes a generalized basis for the higher education credit systems and proved its efficiency in facilitating student mobility and in developing international curriculum; this can be considered an accumulation of credits or a system for transferring credits.

The main objective of the internationalization of higher education is represented by the development of knowledge, abilities, attitudes and values to be recognizable at international level (Jackson, 2003), requirements that are more and more important in the current globalization era.

Some countries' experiences in HE internationalization

This part analyses the activity of HE internationalization at global level and HE internationalization from the perspective of countries most involved in this process. The most striking indicator of HE internationalization is represented by *student mobility*. According to the last OECD Report *Education at a Glance 2009*, this indicator registered constant growth since the '70-ies, recording in 2007 at world level 3 million students enrolled in programs of study outside their country of citizenship. (See Figure no. 1). This growth trend is considered to accelerate in the years to come. A study conducted by the British Council in 2004 under the coordination of Anthony Böhm, *Vison 2020. Forecasting international student mobility: a UK perspective*, forecasts student mobility to reach 5.8 million students by 2020, while Altbach and Bassett (2004) estimate to reach 8 million foreign students in 2025.

Millions

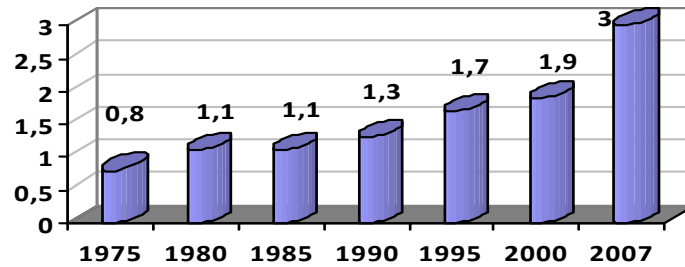


Figure 1. Growth in internationalization of tertiary education (1975-2007)

Source: OECD (2009)

Number of foreign students in HE by country of origin and destination (2007)

Table 1

Country of origin	Country of destination								
	Total all destinations	United States	United Kingdom	Germany	France	Australia	Canada	Japan	New Zealand
China	457,366	98,958	49,594	27,117	18,836	50,418	28,635	80,231	13,535
India	162,221	85,687	23,833	3,899	891	24,523	7,176	434	2,452
Korea	107,141	63,772	4,311	5,206	2,449	5,430	750	22,109	23
Germany	85,963	8,847	14,011	-	6,947	1,866	1,083	404	1,274
France	63,025	6,852	13,068	6,274	-	872	4,944	445	382
Turkey	59,150	11,760	2,233	24,602	2,339	254	690	168	22
Japan	56,060	36,062	5,706	2,385	2,071	3,249	1,611	-	958
United States	52,085	-	15,956	3,411	3,165	3,023	9,129	1,888	2,326
Morocco	50,917	1,229	212	8,095	27,684	12	2,769	47	N/A
Russian Federation	50,724	4,856	2,580	12,831	3,219	530	1,383	375	272
Other	1,876,454	277,852	219,966	164,695	179,011	121,349	74,076	19,776	43,706
Total from all countries, 2007	3,021,106	595,874	351,470	258,513	246,612	211,526	132,246	125,877	64,951

Source: OECD Database for Education, www.oecd.org/education/database, 2009

OECD (2009) also shows that 83.5% of foreign students at global level study in an OECD country, six of which being the main countries of destination: USA – 19.7%, UK – 11.6%, Germany – 8.6%, France – 8.3%, Australia – 7%, Canada – 4.4%. It is interesting to notice that countries in which English is the official language attract 46.6% of the total foreign students at global level.

The regions of origin of foreign students are Asia (1,468,057 foreign students, representing 48.6% of the total), Europe (761,591 students, representing 25.2%), followed by Africa (356,771 students, representing 11.8%), South America (6.9%), North America (3.2%) and Oceania (1%) (OECD, 2009).

In 2007, approximately 3 million people studied outside their country of origin. The top of countries of origin is lead by China (457,366 students), India (162,221 students), Korea (107,141 students) and Germany (on the fourth place, with 85,963 students). The top of countries of destination records on the first three positions: USA (595,874 students), UK (351,470 students) and Germany (258,513 students) (OECD, 2009). See Table no.1.

Based on the above data, we can draw the following conclusions:

- There is a certain imbalance in international mobility flows, imbalance that can be seen either from the perspective of global international flows (the Occident dominates the destinations for studies, whereas the Asian area leads in sending students abroad for higher education training), or from national perspectives (USA has the deepest imbalance between the number of hosted students and the number of sent abroad students);
- At the same time, there is a major imbalance regarding the language of study. We can notice that over 46% of international students study in countries where the official language is English. On top of this adds the fact that many of the countries that have developed policies aiming to attract foreign students promoted mainly programs of study in English. Therefore, it is difficult to discuss about the promotion of multilingualism through the internationalization of HE, under the circumstances where over 60% of foreign students study in English, and other 25-30% of them study in French or German.

In what follows, we aim to present the situation of HE internationalization in several countries that have valuable experience in this process.

United States of America

The internationalization of HE in the USA knew a rapid acceleration immediately after the end of the 2nd World War, once with USA's affirmation as world superpower (Merkx, 2005). So, political leaders together with visionary academic leaders promoted international academic programs over the time, both through the attraction of foreign students in the USA and through the exposure of the American students to cultures and educational systems from other continents. In this context, many prestigious universities from US benefitted from mobility programs in order to develop trans-cultural perspectives on the specific fields of teaching and research and to continuously improve the curricula, in the last years (Siaya and Hayward, 2003). At the same time, universities in partnership with private companies launched many initiatives in the area of the internationalization of education, US becoming one of the most active and innovative nations from this perspective.

Even though after September 11, 2001 the American Government hardened visa regime and the legislation regarding the access in the US, American universities continue to develop programs dedicated to international students, especially through the promotion of on-line post-graduate academic programs. One example is that of the University of Phoenix, that developed *offshore academic programs* (University of Phoenix, 2009).

It is considered that there are *two major advantages* of the internationalization of HE in the USA: (i) consolidation of external political and economic relations of USA through the attraction and training (in the American system) of foreign specialists in key fields, which will support and develop reforms and socio-economic progress at their return in their home countries; (ii) attraction for the US research and labour markets of valuable students to be trained in the American system to be employed after graduation in the American hi-tech industry. Another important motivation of the American HE internationalization phenomenon is given by the economic factor. An annual study published by NAFSA (2009) in the USA shows the major positive impact foreign students and their families have on the American economy, reaching in 2007-2008 the amount of 15.54 billion US\$, with an increase of over 20% in just 4 years.

Cumulating more strengths than weaknesses and more opportunities than threats, the American HE system continues to represent a major attraction point for all those that desire (and afford) to study in top 10 universities of any of the international academic ranking. USA, together with UK and Australia, benefitting of the great advantage of English as native and teaching language, continues to dominate the world market of HE.

United Kingdom

In its estimations from a decade ago, British Council showed that the international academic programs offered by British universities under the *offshore* formula were expected to surpass the number of foreign students from the Kingdom in 2010; main suppliers of this type of services were Open University and universities from London, Derby, Leicester, Northumbria and Kingston (British Council, 1999). The main geographic area targeted by these suppliers is Asia, whereas the most important field of study is *business* (Garrett, 2004). So far, these estimations tend to be confirmed, having in mind that at present *offshore* students enrolled in British HE institutions represent over 57% of the total number of students from the United Kingdom (HESA, 2009).

In the academic year 2005-2006, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) from UK reported a total number of international students of 307,040 students, and in the academic year 2007-2008 341,791 students (approx. 15% of total students from the UK), showing an increase of over 11% in just two years. It is interesting to notice that UK attracts very many students on the level of post-graduate studies – approx. 46% of the post-graduate students from United Kingdom being international students (HESA, 2009).

Among the most important countries of origin of the international students from the UK, the same statistics offer an image often present in other countries active on the international education market, as well – one third of the foreign students come from Asia (China, India, Japan), equalling the number of international students coming from European Union (HESA, 2009).

Although the main motivation of many British HE institutions at present remains of economic nature (Woodfield, 2007), there are many signals both at system and institutional levels that social, cultural and academic motivations gain more and more importance within the strategies of internationalization and institutional organization in the UK.

Germany

The present high internationalization of German HE represents the result of sustained and unitary efforts directed to this goal, efforts made during a period of several years. The German market orientation of educational offers for foreigners focuses more and more on the special needs of different target groups. This approach distinguishes between *three main target groups* of foreign students with different academic needs and specific material situations (Brandenburg and Federkeil, 2007): a) students coming from developing countries; b) students coming from countries in transition; and c) students coming from industrialized countries.

The elimination of the linguistic barrier deserves an increased attention in the case of Germany. This purpose was served by the introduction of a standard test of German as Foreign language (TestDaF) in April 2001, test that is conducted and corrected in a centralised manner at global level and can be sitted in over 300 centres from 80 countries.

The internationalization of German HE is promoted by non-governmental institutions too, the most important and well-known being DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service).

Starting 1997, when coherent measures aiming at increasing the international character of the German HE were put in practice, the indicators that assess the internationalization degree of HE recorded spectacular evolutions. For instance, the number of foreign students coming to study in Germany increased from 100,033 students in 1997 to 189,450 students in 2007, while the number of German students studying abroad increased from 52,200 in 1997 to 75,800 in 2005 (BMBF, 2008). Therefore, Germany is placed in the top of academic destinations around the globe, after USA, UK and Australia.

The internationalization of Romanian HE - past and present

Romania's case is presented from a historical perspective, which can help us in formulating solutions for the future development of the Romanian HE internationalization. Foreign students represent a constant presence in the Romanian HE even from the beginning of the previous century, but until 1969 they

did not represent more than 1% of the total number of students enrolled in tertiary education. In the 70-ies, Ceaușescu decided to transform Romania in a supplier of academic services, in particular for other communist countries, but also for states from Asia and Africa which desired to prepare their citizens and could afford to pay the bill in hard currencies. Special policies were created in this respect: tuition fees were established under the level of other countries, special services for foreign students in Romanian universities were created (tutorials for Romanian language, access to libraries, special HE regulations, and special conditions for accommodation etc.). Thus, the number of foreign students in Romania reached 10% of the total enrolments in less than 10 years. At the beginning of the 80-ies, Romania was situated among the first 15 providers of academic services for foreign students, with a number of 16,962 international students enrolled in 1981, year after which foreign students' number decreased due to economic and social conditions. After the events from 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, foreign students' interest in Romania started to increase again, but Romanian authorities' and universities' apathy lead to the decrease of Romania's importance on the international market of HE (Pricopie, 2004).

After 1989, we can observe a diversification in the categories of foreign students. Romania signed new bilateral agreements with other states (European states, USA, Canada) which included the possibility of student exchanges. Romania joined the Socrates Program in 1996, a program that contains an important component of academic exchanges (ERASMUS). Also, since 1991, the Romanian government granted a significant number of scholarships to Romanians living in the Republic of Moldova, on a yearly basis.

Despite these facts, the balance is still negative for Romania. The number of foreign students studying in Romania as a result of bilateral agreements is insignificant (200 students the most), while the number of ERASMUS students coming to study to Romania in the last four years was four time lower than the number of Romanian students leaving to study in the European Union countries (Pricopie et. al, 2009).

Another important step in the internationalization of the Romanian academic environment was the launch of HE programs in other languages than Romanian. In the 90-ies, the Ministry of Education created special academic programs in medicine, political sciences, public administration, engineering etc., having English, German, French, Hungarian and others as teaching languages. These programs were the ones that attracted foreign students coming to Romania. Unfortunately, the global economic recession did not avoid the higher education sector, and at present the number of international students enrolled in Romanian universities decreased in comparison to previous years, attaining approx. 7,800 students (accounting for 1.5% of total students), without taking into consideration the students from the Republic of Moldova (MECI, 2009). See Figure 1.

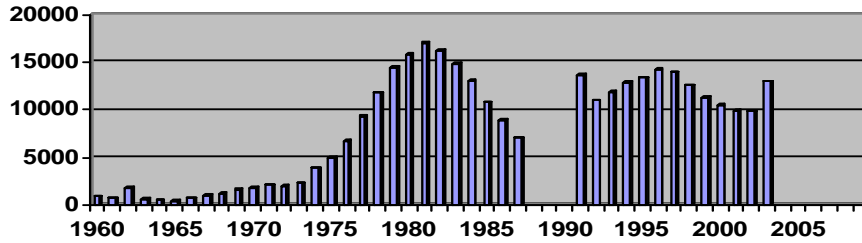


Figure 2. Foreign students enrolled in Romania, in the period 1960 - 2009

Source: Sadlak (1990) for the period 1960-1988; World Bank (1996) for the period 1989-1994; National Institute of Statistics, for the period 1995-2002; MECI (2009) for the period 2003-2009.

In Romania, in the academic year 2006-2007 a number of 10,400 foreign students were enrolled, accounting for 1.3% of the total number of students enrolled in HE (INS,2008), a low percentage in comparison to other countries. In 2007, the highest percentages of foreign students in the total number of students enrolled in tertiary education are to be found in New Zealand (26.8%) Australia (22.5%), UK (19.5%), Switzerland (19.3%), but in absolute figures, the country with the highest number of foreign students received is USA (595,874 foreign students), followed by UK (351,470 foreign students), Germany (258,513 foreign students) and France (246,612 foreign students) (OECD, 2009). The regions of origin of the foreign students from Romania in the academic year 2006-2007 were Europe (69%), Asia (16.1%), Africa (13.2%) and North America, South America and Australia (1.7%), as presented in Figure 2 (INS, 2008).

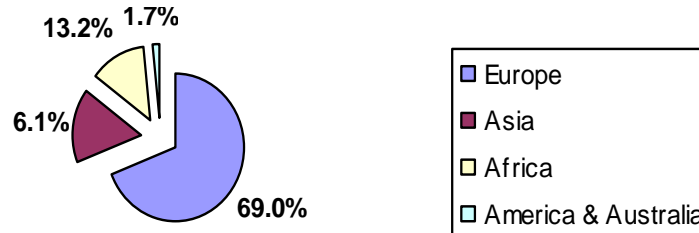


Figure 3: The structure of foreign students enrolled in Romanian universities by regions of origin - 2006

Source: INS (2008)

Last statistical data available demonstrate an increase in the interest of young people from various parts of the world in Romanian universities. Still, this

increase is frail under the circumstances in which at global level growth dynamic was in some countries of 10-20% per year (OECD, 2004).

At the moment Romania is lagging behind, as compared to other countries that are advanced in the higher education internationalization process and if it wants to diminish the gap, it needs to take proactive measures.

Conclusions and proposals for further development of HE internationalisation in Romania

Romania is lagging behind and it lost the competitive advantage previously hold in the former political regime for students originating from certain, mainly developing countries. This section will emphasize on a number of proposals for the development of HE internationalization. Proposals are made at two levels: ministerial and institutional level.

Proposals of strategic measures at governmental / ministerial level

Measures to be adopted at governmental and/or ministerial level for the promotion of the internationalization of some Romanian universities need to be organically integrated in the strategy of higher education, as the internationalization is one of the vectors needed for the achievement of the national strategic objectives. In order to place the Romanian HE on the map of global HE, at a general level is needed to:

- Establish a **coordinating body** to actively pursue the achievement of this goal, probably under the Ministry of Education and Research;
- Create several **competitive advantages** (by changing the HE system from within) to be communicated and promoted abroad;
- Formulate a **strategy on the long run** at the level of the coordinating body, built on competitive advantages;
- Pursue the **increase in the quality of higher education** in all fields: teaching activity and scientific research activity, in order to ensure the visibility of Romanian HE at international level;
- Perform **strong promotional activities** within HE internationalization strategy. **Educational marketing activities** could be done by attracting students, young scientific researchers and scientists from the globe to study and research within higher education institutions from Romania.

The main two categories of measures that can be taken at ministerial level comprise measures to complete and amend the legal framework, and measures to increase the awareness, recognition and attractiveness of Romanian programs of study. Among the *measures to complete and amend the legal framework* we propose: better institutional and decisional autonomy in the case of accepting for studies candidates without Romanian citizenship; the abolishment of existing barriers on the employment through contest of foreign teachers; the encouragement and motivation of universities that earned a high degree of trust from an authorized quality assurance agency, to adopt and implement comprehensive

internationalization strategies; the adoption of secondary legislation needed for the transparent, fair and simple implementation of double degree diploma for the graduates of those programs of study that are attended in two universities, according to inter-academic agreements.

Among the *measures aiming to increase the awareness, recognition and attractiveness* of study activities in Romania we can mention: the set up, continuous update and promotion in Romania and at international level of a national portal for information purposes, called “*Study in Romania*”; the mandatory requirement to set up and continuously update the English version of the website, together with the Romanian version, for the universities that had obtained the rating of high institutional trust.

Proposals of strategic measures at institutional level

Our *recommendations* for strategic measures for universities in order to promote the international dimension of their activities are the following:

- The integration of the international dimension in all aspects of the institutional strategy for development;
- The promotion of the quality culture in all fields and activities performed in university campus;
- The implementation of Bologna instruments, in full compatibility with the European recommendations: ECTS credit system, diploma supplement, standardized description of HE qualifications, and automatic certification of their compatibility with the *European Qualifications Framework*;
- The promotion of the international mobility of students, teachers and researchers can be stimulated through: information dissemination on recent performances recorded in national and international scientific contests, bachelors and masters employability, scientific recognition of the results of doctoral students and post-doc researchers, information on the journals and other occasional publications of the university etc.;
- Careful selection of partner institutions in bilateral international cooperation and the adhesion to regional networks for cooperation in the field of education and/or research need to be coordinated in such a way not to prejudice the cooperation with the most prestigious similar institutions from other countries. University management needs to understand that not every inter-institutional collaboration agreement is equally well seen by prestigious universities from across the globe.
- Universities need to propose themselves the promotion of the better usage of the newest information and documentation technologies in the teaching – learning activity, in the access to libraries and in the preparation of individual or team projects;
- The alignment of curricula and mostly, of the recommended readings for individual study to the newest papers, articles and studies of reference, published abroad or in the country;

- Study and living conditions from student campuses cannot be neglected either. A gradual improvement in quality to the standards for European university campuses is needed;
- Some universities can invest in their own brand and in its promotion among current and past students (alumni), as a premise for the attractiveness of future students, including those from other countries. Systematic information on the main achievements of the institution in the fields of teaching, researching and publishing through its website is also needed.

A successful internationalization strategy in Romania will depend on the adequate mix of competitive and cooperative options. The biggest challenge governments need to face is to conceive this type of strategies in a coherent way, being aware of the fact that they define in a great extent internationalization opportunities for higher education institutions. The success of the Romanian HE internationalization preoccupations depends on the vision and the means available for the materialization of this aspiration – on one hand, and on the synergy of the measures adopted at both decisional levels: ministerial and institutional – on the other hand. Bologna instruments represent a good promotion vehicle for the internationalization, but the international visibility of the university depends on the inventiveness and perseverance of each institution to promote the educational offer and to attract foreign students, on the coherence and efficacy of the adopted measures at central level and by university in order to assure the international competitiveness in the field of higher education and research.

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